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TAGS: [KIRF](#) [KJUS](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: KIDNAPPINGS OF IRAQI CHRISTIANS RAISES CONCERNS
REF: VATICAN 101

Classified By: Acting DCM Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: A series of high profile kidnappings of Iraqi Christians over the past several months in Mosul, Kirkuk, and Baghdad have raised concerns amongst Christian leaders that the community is being deliberately targeted by criminal gangs. Whether the kidnappings are politically motivated has become a source of debate amongst Church leaders. As a result of the kidnappings, a small group of families has recently fled Kirkuk and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) have increased their security profile within that city. END SUMMARY.

Violence and Kidnapping

12. (C) Over the past several weeks, Iraqi Christian leaders have expressed growing concern that criminal gangs have targeted their community for kidnappings in order to secure large ransom payments. On September 28, Father Ragheed Georges Hermiz of the Roman Catholic Church told Poloff that the Christian community had witnessed 14-15 kidnapping incidents over the past six months. Hermiz said that most of those kidnapped were released after a ransom payment was made, but that they were generally tortured while in captivity. Hermiz cited three specific incidents that he knew about from Baghdad including those of Rosa Khaldoun, a 65-year old woman who was killed by her assailants, Salem Attar, a 31-year old who was kidnapped and released after a ransom was paid, and Ahmed Salim, a personal friend of his who was kidnapped and held for 15 days during which he was starved and had his hands broken.

13. (SBU) In Mosul, press reports indicated and PRT contacts confirmed that a Christian doctor named Mahasin Bashir was kidnapped from her home on September 27 and held for one day and then released when a \$40,000 ransom was paid. On September 11, Hikmat Sayid a Christian who had been kidnapped in late August was released. On September 3, the body of Salem Barjjo, a 60-year old Christian businessman kidnapped in early August in Mosul was found after his family was unable to pay the demanded ransom. In Kirkuk, a Christian doctor, Sameer Gorgees was kidnapped on August 18 and held for nearly a month before being released on September 16 after his family paid a \$100,000 ransom. Another Christian, Sabah Daoud Sulayman, was killed on August 18 attempting to stop the kidnapping. During his captivity, Gorgees was badly beaten and remains hospitalized. On October 4, a 55-year old Christian nurse Imad Elias Abdul Karim was kidnapped and then killed a day later, prompting the Chaldean Archbishop of Kirkuk Louis Sako to state publicly that the recent kidnappings were politically motivated.

The ISF Responds as Emigration Begins

14. (C) As a result of the recent kidnappings, approximately

23 Christian families have left Kirkuk over the past three weeks, with some departing for neighboring countries and others reportedly heading north to the relative safety of the Kurdistan Region. (Note: Christian leaders estimate the size of their community in Kirkuk at 10,000 persons. End note.) In response, the Deputy Commander of Iraqi Police in Kirkuk General Tourhan told PRT officer that additional security has been provided to the church in Kirkuk and that patrols have been increased in Christian areas, but that protection of the community was difficult because the families were dispersed in numerous mixed neighborhoods and because the community had made no specific requests to bolster their safety. Tourhan made no specific requests to bolster their safety. Tourhan stated that an investigation was underway into the recent kidnappings, but that there were currently no leads to pursue. Tourhan opined that the motive of the kidnappers was financial rather than political and that they targeted Christians because they were perceived to be affluent. Similarly, the Assyrian Archbishop of Kirkuk, Mar Narsay, told Poloff on September 13 that while violence in Kirkuk was worse in 2009 than in previous years, that it was criminally, rather than politically, motivated. In Ninewah, as a result of the kidnappings and of car bombs in August and September that targeted ethnic minority communities, some Christian villages have established their own security patrols and neighborhood watch efforts.

Ambassador Engages with Cardinal Delly

15. (C) On October 9, Ambassador Hill met with the Patriarch of the Chaldean Church, Cardinal Emmanuel Delly, to express

BAGHDAD 00002812 002 OF 002

concern about the plight of Christians in Kirkuk and Ninewah.

During the meeting, Cardinal Delly did not comment on the specific topic of kidnappings, but rather expressed concern more generally about the need for more economic development and better services for Christian areas in the north. The Cardinal also made the point that the biggest threat to the Christian community in Iraq was not violence, but the ease with which Iraqi Christians were allowed to claim refugee status in Europe and the United States. Cardinal Delly expressed similar sentiments with Embassy Vatican Poloff on September 25 stating that there was no organized persecution of Christians in Iraq (reftel).

16. (C) COMMENT: The phenomenon of kidnapping for ransom, as well as high profile robberies, has been increasing throughout Iraq over the course of the past year, most likely due to poor economic conditions, a weak security environment, and a willingness of victims' families to pay ransom. While hard data remains elusive, the Embassy has received numerous anecdotal reports that criminal gangs are targeting affluent Iraqis and their children, regardless of their religious or sectarian affiliation. For their part, prominent Church leaders are divided over whether the kidnappings are political/sectarian or criminal. END COMMENT.
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